

Plans for travel
bubble deflated

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Not the right time for travel bubbles

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PETALING JAYA: The hoped-for travel bubbles to help revive tourism may have already burst even before they took shape.

Players in the travel business have resigned to the fact that attempts to ease travel is still a long way off. Health experts have warned against promoting travel and tourism before the latest surge in Covid-19 infections is fully contained.

Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (Matta) secretary-general Nigel Wong acknowledged that any changes will depend on how well the spread of the virus can be curbed.

"We have been lobbying for the travel bubble for some time now, but

➤ Surge in Covid-19 cases put paid to plan to woo visitors, say tourism players

it looks like it won't happen for a while yet," he told *theSun* yesterday.

Wong insisted that travel for leisure should be allowed under a proposal to create travel bubbles between cities rather than countries.

President of Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association (Mita) Uzaidi Udanis said Singaporean visitors are important to the Malaysian tourism industry.

"Last year, nearly eight million Singaporeans visited Malaysia. However, under the Reciprocal Green Lane and Periodic Commuting Arrangement initiatives in place now,

only essential travel for Singaporeans is allowed. Business and leisure travel are still barred."

He agreed that given the current severity of the Covid-19 outbreak, tourism industry players should learn to live with the new reality.

Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman of Universiti Putra Malaysia said under the present situation, any move to have travel bubbles should be postponed.

"The government can reconsider this plan once we have overcome the crisis at hand," said the tropical health epidemiologist.

Virologist Prof Dr Sandy Loh from the University of Nottingham Malaysia said travel bubbles should not be implemented now as the pandemic has not subsided yet.

There are not many promising 'green zone' Asean countries. Nations like Indonesia have reported alarming numbers, indicating that they have not effectively managed the spread of Covid-19, she said.

"Many countries are going through second and third waves of this pandemic just like we are, and asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic cases account for around 50% of infections. They can transmit the virus to others for an extended period, even longer than 14 days.

Asymptomatic carriers entering our country may cause a spike in cases, she said.